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# Home Cookery Project

## On A One-burner Hot Plate

by Margaret Leveson

**C**OULD A pioneer woman have passed an Iowa State foods practical examination? Can a "standard product" be prepared without benefit of a sterile laboratory and carefully regulated temperatures? Can a home project make summer even more fun than usual? And if the writer tells you the answer to each of these questions is "yes," will you question her sanity? Read on, oh person of little faith!

One warm June day a just-past-sophomore home economics student stepped out of the cooled interior of the City of Los Angeles into the dusty gold of a California spring. Clutched in one moist hand was a hairnet; the other held a well-thumbed wine-colored foods manual; a white foods uniform lay ready for immediate use in the suitcase nearby. I (and the personal pronoun might as well enter now as later, for you'll guess soon anyway) mumbled "one serving of green leafy or yellow vegetables daily" to the porter and flew into waiting parental arms.

### *Balanced Meal*

And then it happened! "We're building a beach house, dear." (this from one parent). "We'll be living there most of this summer. . . it's not very liveable yet . . . just a one-burner hot plate and an almost uninsulated icebox" (this from the other one). "It takes half an hour to make coffee in the morning, but you won't mind waiting. . . for there's the ocean. . ."

And, interestingly enough, it was all true. Though I wouldn't recommend it as constant routine, waiting for water to boil is easy if you have rolling breakers to watch. And a one-burner hot plate *can* turn out a well balanced meal, for basic procedures apply regardless of place, and there can be method even in madness.

The two utensils that I kept most constantly in use were a double boiler and a heavy covered frying pan. Fortunately, we had an automatic coffee-maker and a waffle iron. Fortunately again, the warm summer weather was ideal for serving cold dishes.

I learned not to consider a double boiler in efficient use unless there was something in both top and bottom compartments. The Pyrex one I used made it easy to heat creamed tuna or tomato soup in the top part while a vegetable or stew simmered in the lower part. I turned European with the frying pan and made one dish meals, blending many vegetables together for quick steam cooking, pot-roasting vegetables with Swiss steak, and dipping into Italian, Chinese and Mexican cookery for the best ways to

use my small amount of cooking space. The waffle iron also made desserts, such as chocolate, gingerbread or shortcake sections. It made french toast, and thin, crisp biscuits — these were made from dough rolled to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thickness and cut into regular rounds.

Chocolate puddings, molded salads and soft custards I made after breakfast, catching the hot plate while it was living up to its name. We used lots of fresh fruit and raw vegetables, for texture as well as for their ease of preparation. The one luxury item, for which we gladly used the hot plate and frying pan unhindered by double boilers or double use of the skillet, was fried fish. I learned to toss a line into the surf while the hot plate shook itself into early morning production, and sometimes I was rewarded with sweet perch for the breakfast table. One night we entertained with a huge pot of slightly garlicked chicken and spinach soup, mugs of coffee and platters of dark breads with meat and blended cheese spreads. Another time we served Italian spaghetti with a tray of crisp chilled celery, carrots and cauliflowers, and crusty hard rolls heated in the top of the double boiler, covered with a dry towel.

Cooking over a wood fire presents altogether different problems, for though it's easier to control the heat, there is more smoke, insects, unexpected hot places to lean against, and lack of salt than in the most primitive beach house. The same multiple use of utensils proved possible, however, and we found dried fruits and cereals could be started over the dying fire at night and need only rewarming for breakfast.

### *Camp Cookery*

I never learned to make good camp coffee — it always tasted of hemp. But fried eggs, meat cakes and pancakes came out as standard as a modern range would have cooked them. We bought milk and bread, depended on sandwiches for lunch, gathered wild blackberries to augment fruit purchased along the highway, and used quantities of canned foods. But rather than use food straight from the cans, we blended contents and flavors, seasoned with wild bay leaves, varied with fresh vegetables and tomatoes.

Processes learned in primitive situations also adapt themselves readily to modern kitchens, and the former may be more conducive to caution than the latter. I *did* pass the practical examination and in doing so I got my only bad burn of the summer!